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WOLF'S-BANE

BOOKS BY JOHN COWPER POWYS

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WOLF'S-BANE
RHYMES

BY

JOHN COWPER POWYS

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine—"

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

G. ARNOLD SHAW
NEW YORK
1916

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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO
MY LEARNED AND CRITICAL FRIEND
LLEWELLYN JONES

358604

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WOLF'S-BANE

APOLOGIA

THESE bitter stammered rhymes,
Tuneless so many times,
And always rent and torn,
What have they they can plead
At the bar of the critic-breed,
That to life they should be born?

Nothing but this, that they,
In their own drifting way,
Express the soul that bred 'em.
And it is something if verse,
For many a priest does worse,
Takes a man and his style to wed 'em.

In every child of earth
There runs thro' his head from birth
A broken stammered tune,
The fairy-tale of his days;
And 'tis much, if, with little to praise,
He can mutter this to the moon.

For the little things he spied at,
And the little things he cried at,
Take a far-flung wistful gleam,
And seem as they drift on the mood
Of his verse, however crude,
To belong to the infinite stream.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

AH, poet — you, who sing
"The days that are no more"—
There is a bitterer sting
In the days that *never were.*

For lying alone in the night,
Hearing the wind at play,
I know such days to have been my right.
Yet they came and took them away.

I never knew them! They stole
The sorrow out of my sleep;
The crying out of my dreams.
I cannot even weep.

They came and took them — they stole
The longing that was my right,
The grief that was my child.
They left me alone in the night.

"Never was" has a sharper sting
Than "No more," as roll the years;
And the gods take everything
When they take away our tears.

PAST AND PRESENT

I'LL never forgive you!" I said,
As among the Phloxes we went,
Where the orchard-rails begin;
And now that the Phloxes are dead
And the apples gathered in,
My anger is quite spent.

But between your hands and me —
Hands that I hated so
Because they were like a girl's! —
Leagues of unfathomed sea
Under the cold moon flow,
Sprinkled with wrecks, not pearls.

And "I'll never forgive" has turned
To "I'll never forget" and you, —
Ah! that's the sharpest sting! —
While the too soft hands I spurned
Are now my only clue,
Have forgotten everything.

And over the Phloxes' grave
Grow other, alien flowers,
And the orchard rails are gone.
Life will not stoop to save
Even such tokens as ours,
As it roars and eddies on.

With wrecks strewn, not with pearls,
Are our far-divided sands,

As the salt sea holds us apart,
Are they still as soft as a girl's,
Or have they hardened, your hands,
As I seek to harden my heart?

TO ONE WHO SPOKE OF ETERNAL THINGS

HUSH! for the shadow of a flower
Upon a sun-warmed stone,
Your "Highest Truth" with all its power
I'd willingly disown.

Hush! for a glance thro' the lattice flung
Upon a sleeping brow,
Your "Thunder of the Immortal Tongue"
I'd lightly disavow.

The eternal law, the deep life-stream,
Why should I worship these?
Better the briefest human dream
Among the fading trees!

Better the frailest human touch
When the harebells cover the hill,
Or the broken memory of such
When the heart has its will!

Better the toss of the daffodil's head
When the swallow dips in the pool!
Better the rain on the crocus-bed
That keeps the twilight cool!

Better — I see it now! — that look,
  Mixed strangely with shells and sand,
And the uncut page of a curious book
  And the quiver of a hand!

The little things — the little things —
  The things that fade and die —
The perfume of their passing brings
  More than Eternity.

REGRET

GENTLY you whispered, "you'll forget;"
And I, who with "Never!" kissed you,
Know that my bitterest regret
Is not that I have missed you.

'Tis that a thing more sweet, more rare
Than aught in life I've seen,
Can mingle with the common air
And be as 't had not been!

PUT OUT THE LIGHT

PUT out the light; — and then
Put out the light!"
O loss to mortal men
Of all delight!
You who were so sun-fair
Your beauty warmed the air,
You who were so care-free
You healed all misery,
Must cry with ghosts upon the wind
Or be in frozen earth confined.
The fairest things are the briefest things;
And the sweetest soonest die;
No sign, no trace, no memory clings
To earth or sea or sky.

OMENS BY THE WAY

DEAR God! Our pilgrimage
Is a strange-scawléd page
Of script concealed by script!
Sweetness beyond belief
Leaps on us like a thief;
And when the joy has gone
Ashes we feed upon;
Then onward are we whipped.

Voices out of thin air find us,
When did we hear them before?
Footsteps follow close behind us
Along the empty shore.
Footsteps of whom?
And from what country do they come?

A starved and wrinkled tree
Has memories for me,
Pulling me fathoms deep
Under strange seas of sleep.
Life whispers "Memories of what?"
The soul within me answers not.

Sweet Christ! our wayfaring
Is an unholy thing.
We stumble over graves.
We open sealéd doors.
We sink thro' broken floors.
We walk on perilous waves.

Just now within a crowd,
  Lovely, but like a ghost,
  One face, amid a host,
Beckoned me. Like a cloud
Of fire rose Babylon:
And dreaming I walked on.

Flutes in the air! They came
  With February's sun.
Thoughts, buried under mountains, swift as flame
  To meet this fluting run!

THE CLOCK

WHY do you go to that grand hotel
Of iron and marble built?"
—"I do not know — I cannot tell —
Yet something in me could answer well
If it would." And I blushed with guilt.

"Try to say it," she said. "Is't the gilded roof,
Or the bunches of roses red,
Or the airy corridors, fire-proof,
Or the servants' velvet tread?"

—"Yes, these — but something more than these!
Hush! Did you hear that sound?
The corner-clock! It brings release
To ghosts of underground.

"No other House, no other place,
Chants me these wistful rhymes
That bring first love and a long-lost face
And London, with their chimes."

ICE

'TIS not my fault that I am cold
Or that my mind affects
Each thought, each movement, of the souls
That my poor heart reflects.
When under ice the river rolls,
Do the waves ask the frost
Why with strange symbols manifold
Its glassy face is crossed?

Enough, if skating on that ice
Which is my heart, O friends,
Chasing the shapes that come not twice,
You turn ere daylight ends!
There is a place — avoid it! — where
That slippery mask's worn thin.
A depth of drowning water's there.
'Twere pity to slip in!

CENSORSHIP

THE twisted hearts, the crumpled brains,
The broken spirits of us all,
How could they tolerate life's pains
If the quips and the nods
And the mocks at the gods,
And the wicked smiles
And the wanton wiles,
Which make things even,
Were censored on earth as well as in heaven?

We are all condemned, as the deep tide rolls:
A prayer or a kiss —
'Tis hit or miss.
The goldenest lover
The earth must cover
Along with the fool
Who holds life a school
For hammering noble souls.

Let us be kind to one another then;
And remembering we are men
Of one stuff spun,
Make of our miching-mallecho
A cowslip-ball to toss and throw
At the moon or the sun!

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

THE humming sea is full of dirges
Rung and tolled.
The drifting sea beneath its surges
Doth enfold
Bones and skulls that once made sleep
Flee from hearts impassioned deep;
Flee from eyes that could not weep.
They have lost their former spell —
Seaweeds cover them too well.

And the lovers of these bones,
Where they hear not the sea's dirges,
Speak in quiet patient tones
Of what lie beneath the surges —
She no more, they say, will feel
The harsh turning of life's wheel.
She no more will feel, they say,
The sharp pinching of life's play.

But the poor bones, tossed and tangled,
Hearing those sea-dirges jangled,
Mutter sadly, in their moving
Tomb, of what they've lost.
Ah! they moan — that we again
Might drive sleep away from men!

Thus the tender thoughts of lovers
Whom the warm sweet flesh still covers
Differ from the thoughts of those
Who have passed into repose!

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

I AM for you; I am against the oppressor!
Proud and glad am I to be numbered with you.
Yea, my heart is yours, and what wit is in me
Strikes in your service.

O ye driven armies of slaves and outcasts,
Cursed were I with the curse of Cain, if ever
I forgot your tears in the halls of Egypt,
Feasting with Pharaoh!

Yet, behold! There's something beyond and over;
Something without which, tho' we rose and trampled
All the tyrant hordes into hell and under,
Still were we empty.

Sounding brass and tinkling cymbals were we
Though with meat and wine and with kisses sated,
If the Clue — the Signal — the Burning Candle,
Passed us unheeded.

Yea, there's something — something beyond and over —
Without which, tho' in hell, like sheep, our masters
Bleat their overthrowing and our uprising,
Still we go naked.

Who can name it? Who has the right to name it?
None, ah none! And yet in the world's confusions
With lips pure, hearts purged, to refuse to seek it
Is to die living.

THO' LOVE HAS FLOWN

LET the wind wail on, my dear,
And the branches moan.
Light the candles; have no fear;
Draw the curtains; dry your tear;
Tho' love has flown.

He will come again, my child;
He will come back.
Over the hill and out of the wild,
From the long, long road, by your light beguiled,
He will come back.

DE PROFUNDIS

O SAVIOUR of the World, who by
Thy Cross and Passion — Still that tragic cry
Pierces the blanket of our plight,
And stabs a scarlet wound into our night.

O Son of David, hear our piteous call!
Have mercy on us all!
For our loves turn to dust,
And our swords turn to rust,
And our days run out like sand.

O Christ, if you never lived our hearts have made you!
O Christ, if you never died our hearts betrayed you!
O Saviour of the World,
Save us and help us!

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

OUT into the cool clear air
Where love, like music, dies behind us!
Out of the torches' flare,
Where lust lacks wings ever to find us!
Out into regions where
Hushed is the old mad tune; —
Out into the cool clear air;
To the other side of the moon!

THEIR KISSES ON MY MOUTH

THEIR kisses on my mouth, sweetheart,
Are frozen — cold and few;
And I come back to you;
Their lovely magic waxeth old;
Their cunning is a tale that's told;
My soul is parched with drought, sweetheart,
And I come back to you.

PANEM ET CIRCENSES

THE crumbs of bitter comfort fall;
Our throats are parched; our mouths are dry;
The dead leaves drift along the wall;
"A little happiness!" we cry.

"Not much — not long; enough to drink
Once of the sweet sun, ere we go.
Not long — not much; enough to know
Once how the gods live, ere we sink."

"Serve Life" — they preach — "Your pleasure's naught.
Serve Life and die." Must those, who never
Asked to be born, be balked of their retort?
"Life is our enemy forever!"

Thus have the generations cried —
"O Unknown, let us feel content
We had our jest before we went —
We were revenged before we died!"

LOVE–IN–IDLENESS

YOU love him and I love you;
And, since my heart shows it,
You can never love me true;
All creation knows it.

I love you and you love him;
He loves yet another!
So we human midges skim,
Biting each the other.

If some Puck could just let fall,
From his fairy flower,
That mad juice upon us all —
What a heavenly hour!

You'd love me as I love you;
She'd love him; and he
Would love — does it matter who,
So it left *us* free?

REVERSION

YES it is surely true
That I who loved with you
That magic Beardsley book
With its Sidonian look
And those androgynous masks that smirk and grin,
Seraphic imps of sin;
That I who muttered my mystic credo
In the Cathedral of Toledo
And traced the arabesques of doom
On the last Cæsar's tomb,
And thro' the rose-parterres
Caught Babylonian airs,
And 'twixt the kneeling mutes
Heard Carthaginian flutes;
Am now content to let all go
And plant geraniums in a row
And with my lady's piano-tuner
Wish that the holidays came sooner!

THE LAST ILLUSION

WE only played at love;
That's not the link between us;
Love's ashes nothing prove;
That's how the world has seen us.

Under the cinders cold
Of that light-kindled spark
The eternal flame has rolled
And fused us in the dark.

On then with your deadly wit
And the darts of your glacial eyes!
Mock love and slander it
Where under the dust it lies!

For I, I can bear your scorn
As I follow wandering fires,
Driven like all men born
By unredeemed desires;

And you, you can bear my mild
Submission to your taunts;
My pose of an injured child,
Mixed with unseemly vaunts.

For we both know well, — though it stings,
And we'll mock at it to the last;
That under these casual things
Something holds us fast.

COMPENSATION

AFTER all
There are moments,
Even for the most unhappy,
When, out of some tiny crevice,
Some small overlooked chink in the great Wine-Vat,
The good liquor spurts forth
Into our mouth.

And we remember
How long ago the rain-wet celandines
Pierced us with memories,
With memories of things deeper than sleep or death
And older than all the orbits of the planets.

Over the tossing poplars,
Over the misty plough-lands,
Over the dreamy meadows,
Those memories came;
Nor did they melt to nothing
Even when, from the witch-girl's window,
The lamp-light streamed across the night.

And we remember
How from a long straight road —
Somewhere — no matter where —
While at our feet silver-weed and dandelion
Laughed out of the hot dust,
Somewhere — no matter where —
We heard it; we knew it;
The Sea! The Sea! The Sea!

THE TRUTH?

COME, my enemies, my friends,
Let us drop this pose!
Now the light's out the play ends
And the door must close.

Let us drop our masks and be
Just for once ourselves,
Saints and Satyrs shamelessly,
Goblins, Imps and Elves.

You love him and I love you,
Why not say it then?
God in heaven! let's once be true
To what makes us men!

Christ in heaven! let's once forego
Caution and discretion!
You — you there — whom I hate so,
What is your confession?

Eh? Is that the truth? Well, I
Feel the same; — so we
Stripped of the eternal lie
Can for once agree!

You — you there — my one delight,
What have you to say?
What? Not that! — Up with the light!
Back to our old play!

TO A PERSON TALKING OF "REAL LIFE"

AND so you really hold —
You poor incredible ass! —
That all this steel and gold
And all this roaring mass,
These shops — these streets — these jostling cars,
Represent life — beneath the stars?

Nom de Dieu! all the while
These bawling bandits strive
With brazen fraud and guile
To keep themselves alive,
The eternal gods in deep contempt
Frustrate the insolent attempt.

These things of iron and brass
These manikins of clay —
You poor unmeasured ass! —
Deem you life flows their way?
Mere weight, mere noise, mere rampant size,
Are nothing to the Destinies!

Deem you that that deep tide,
Which flowed thro' Cæsar's veins,
And poured from Jesus' side,
Cares for their withered gains?
Their works, like writings on the sands,
Are — and are not; — as it commands.

The scurf of our old earth
Has bred that kind before,
Unconscious of their birth,
And will again; the shore
Of life is strewn with such;

But the deep waters' flow,
Where the horizons touch,
And the vast sea-winds blow,
Knows nothing of them — Ass!

Life and Reality
Are high evasive things
That come on eagles' wings.
All else is mud and dust and farce
And sheer nonentity.
Go — find a girl — and see!

DAWN

BLOW out the candles, my little one,
Lest more moths burn themselves;
The moon must soon give place to the sun;
And our watch by the dead be over and done;
O I am cold, — cold!

Out of the marshes the wild-geese rise
And float away on the misty skies;
And the ash-tree leaves on the pale grass shiver
To feel the dawn come up from the river.
O I am cold, — cold!

Fetch sticks for the fire, my little son;
We know of what wood those are;
And who gathered them for us one by one
As far he went, — how far!
Never again, son, never again!
Why does the dawn tap on the pane
Like a traveller sick and old?

O that this night might have lasted on! —
Listen! Is that their feet? —
With you and me, my little son,
And him there, under the sheet;
Lasted on and on and on!
O I am cold, — cold.

THE VOICE OF DEMOGORGON

PALSIED and fevered and blind,
Driven by madnesses strange,
Aching and loathing it all,
In our planetary hospital,
Day and night we cry for a change.

And the wind-tossed woods and the wild
Waters that wash our shores,
Unappeased, unreconciled,
Cry also without a pause.

And sometimes, between the souls
Of our desperate mad-house men
In the hospital of the world
And these, there strangely rolls
A tremor of mutual rage;
And a mutual curse is hurled
At the forehead of God; and then
Silence.

And, in the silence, a breath —
Not of man, nor of God, nor of these,
Nor of birth, nor of life, nor of death,
Nor of madness, nor yet disease, —
A strange weird voice from the deep
That opens below all depth; —
"Lo! such are the dreams of sleep.
Ye will wake one day!" it saith.

REMINISCENCE

BENEATH the crumbling cliff we ate our meal.
The grass was dry with sun.
Vague breaths of April stirred. We did not feel
How nearly all was done.

All done, all over, finished with, closed up —
A grave, securely sealed!
The dome of heaven, deep-hollowed like a cup,
Nothing of this revealed.

O you that long ago, that long ago
I loved, what forms are they
Gliding so dumb where the blue corn-flowers grow
And the horned poppies sway?

Why hang their empty hands? Why droop their heads?
Why on their necks sits fate?
So look the lovers who did make their beds
When destiny cried "Wait!"

INITIATION

ONLY those whom the glacier-spears
Pierce as they walk,
On the scoriac heights where the ultimate Fears
Nakedly stalk,
Can taste the quivering cup of the dawn
Where the cowslips grow
And the starlings flying over the lawn
Their shadows throw.

These find in that enchanted hour
The lilac-tinted cuckoo-flower.
These know in that anointed shrine
The rain-washed blue-bell's scent divine.

Only those who have harrowed Hell
Can read the runes of a sea-tossed shell.
Only those who have challenged God
Can hear the worms whisper beneath the sod.

BURIAL

CARRYING tapers in soft white hands,
Whose thin flames blow, by the night winds shaken,
Troop the maidens along the sands,
Where he lies dead whom the sea has taken.

Every law has he trampled on;
Every altar has he defamed;
Outcast, Pariah, curséd one,
By his own kindred shamed.

Was it the sea-gulls whispering the girls
How their lover lay stiff and stark
That made them slip from their wreathéd pearls
And carry their tapers thro' the dark?

Cold his lips as the wind-tossed spray;
Cold his mouth as the drifting foam;
But the candle-bearers kneel and pray
Ere they carry him home.

Two at his head and two at his feet,
And two where hang his hands,
And they chant the Church's dirge complete
As they carry him over the sands:

As they carry him slow to the holy place
Which living he had disdained,
As they lay him low in the tomb of his race
Which in life he had profaned.

When tomorrow's sun shines on the town
The people will curse the dead;
But his victims' tears will trickle down
On the Antichrist's last bed.

THE LAST SAINT

WITH vesture torn and air forlorn
He shuffles on his quest.
His limbs are old; his heart is cold.
By night he gets no rest.

With mock and sneer the people jeer;
Hands wave from windows dim;
With brutal vaunts and obscene taunts
The crowd make sport of him.

Wild thro' his brain the ancient strain
Throbs like a broken chord —
"Until ye die hold charity
More potent than the sword!"

The old men grin to see how thin
He is, and like to droop.
The madmen greet his staggering feet,
And imitate his stoop.

Amid these harms the babes in arms
Alone do not deride;
With large sweet eyes and little cries
They call him to their side.

They weep and crow; they laugh and throw
Themselves upon his breast.
His dim eyes shine; "The Babe divine
Still justifies my quest."

AFFINITY

YOU are not made for me.
Out of the burning sun
Where he sank into the sea
They moulded your glowing breast.
Circe! What have I done
That you should trouble my rest?
You are not made for me.

I was not made for you.
Long since, in the marsh-lands old,
Where the wailing curlew flew,
And the wind talked to the ghouls,
And the moon lay drowned in the pools,
My heart was frozen with cold.
I was not made for you.

Was it drunk with mischief the high,
Immortal, opposeless Will,
Which ruled that you and I
Should the same fate fulfil?
"Marry the fire to the frost,
And see what the atoms will do!"
Is that how the dice were tossed
That were shaken for me and you?

THE LAST WORSHIPPER

BROKEN and shattered
Lie on the stones
The golden censers,
That once scattered
Perfume and prayer;
And unbeholden,
Save of us only,
The high gods lonely
Mount their sad thrones.

And I too, beneath my breath,
Blaspheme and profane the place
With mutterings lewd of death—
But your illumined face,
Strained by the weeping of sacrifice,
And lit by the candles of paradise,
Gleams like a silver cup
To those sad ones offered up;
And as long you yield them that visible cry
The dying gods cannot wholly die.

DE EGYPTU

WHERE the wet bank shines
With the celandines,
And the marigolds mock the moon,
Where the violets tender
Their deep hearts render
To the blackbirds' wistful tune,
Where the woolly sheep
In their hurdles sleep
And the rooks caw from the trees,
I must go; for the end
Is at hand, my friend,
And my heart is sick for these.
I must go; for the end
Is near, my friend;
We have lived. Let loose my hand!
I can get no ease
In my death, Felise,
If I die not in my own land.

INTERCEPTED

SELF-CONSCIOUSLY you leer
From the livid swamp of your eyes;
And my last hopes disappear;
For so unctuously they wink
Over your plump cheek's brink
That I know you have won the prize.

Anoint her with ambergris!
Bind her with lilies fast!
She is not the first — nor is
She likely to be the last.

And you? Listen! There is hate
Whose loathing shudders so,
It cannot strike a blow.
It is dazed by its own weight.

Mad? Of course I am mad.
I have heard her cry to the sun.
But I hate you so much, that I'm glad —
Do you hear? — I am *glad*
You have done what you have done!

THE CLASSIC TOUCH

THEY are the little things
That strike our pulses dumb;
By-issues — nothings — light moth-wings,
Gone almost ere they come.

Caught in a crowded town,
My nerves laid quivering-bare,
To the floor of hell my soul sank down
And howled its protest there.

Bar-windows, Burlesque-signs,
Raw hideousness displayed,
And in unending lines
The people ebbed and swayed.

Foul refuse tinged the snow;
Its taste was in my mouth.
Discordant trolleys row on row
Went East, West, North and South.

Sudden some blessed chance —
O chance bringing gifts to all! —
Led me to cast a glance
On a patch of ancient wall.

And there an indecent sketch
Limned by some laughing boy —
O lovely and obscene wretch! —
Swept from me all annoy.

And the hideous iron place
With its monstrous crowds and cars
Was whirled into outer space
And diffused among the stars.

And alone by the fire with you
I sat and read Rabelais —
Rue des Beaux Arts, mon loup! —
And my soul was once more gay.

And the old great shades returned,
And the large sweet thoughts flowed free,
And my heart within me burned,
And that town was nothing to me!

LOVE

"I LOVE not as you can love,"
I said, as we walked thro' the wheat,
On a day long dead;
And a shadow of trouble stole
Over his wanton brow.
God help us! I see it now.
To the darling of my soul
Those words I said.

And that wheat long ago is cut,
Winnowed and ground and eaten;
And I sit by the side of a slut
Broken by life and beaten.

"I love not as you love, sweet;"
She says; and she little guesses
How I walk again thro' the wheat,
And whom my soul caresses!

THE ULTIMATE

WHEN the head of a man lies under the sod,
And, like little decrepit mice,
The deepest thoughts of his brain creep out,
They have nothing to do with God.
As a rule they're not even pure or nice.
Shall we see, in one case, what they're about?

Sit down on this sun-warmed stone;
And take in your hand this thing —
The skull of a man! Do you feel
How they slipped out one by one,
His curious thoughts? A spell can bring
Them back to the place where I kneel.

One is about the root of a tree
And a Valentine buried there;
One is about a crookéd cross;
A number — ending in nought and three —
Comes next; then a half-penny's loss
In the streets of Rome; then a coil of yellow hair.

A honey-pot in a tea-house, near
To the Penseur of the Panthéon;
A table rapped by spooks, or those
Who sat at it; a passing tear
At Fontainebleau for Napoleon;
And so the list might close.

Or it might go on to other matters
Still stranger, — to geraniums blowing
On sea-side walls; — to ragged shoes

Laid carelessly by skirts in tatters;
To ashes in a broken furnace glowing;
To drops that from a squeezed Pomegranate ooze.

Enough! Put the skull back beneath the sod,
And let the earth fall on it — It is over —
A human life! — and all his thoughts that were
Not very wise, not much concerned with God,
But big enough the whole round earth to cover,
Like mice have scuttled back into the air.

AT A GRAVE

LEAVE the roses; pluck the rue;
Scatter ashes from the urn;
To the cypress and the yew
Let the weeping watchers turn.

For Imagination's dead,
And her body, strewn with balm,
Lieth lovely in its bed,
Safe from any further harm.

Deep they drink, the rabble-rout,
Of reality's dull lees.
"Give us life and truth!" they shout;
"Give us freedom; give us ease!"

And she lieth in her place,
Fair and terrible and cold,
Graved upon her marble face
All the lines of sorrow old.

And reality and truth —
Hideous monsters — howl and rage,
Lapping up the sweat of youth,
Draining down the tears of age.

Fierce about her flames the sword;
Rudely round her rolls the dance;
These may never speak the word
That will rouse her from her trance.

Ah! until he comes, her own,
With the starlight on his brow
And the world-forgetting tone
Which alone the immortals know,

Wrapped in linen-bands she'll keep
Cold, unmoved, her silent scorn,
Waiting in disdainful sleep
The immeasurable dawn.

ON THE DOWNS

SQUEEZE out the cowslip-wine and let me drink
Deep of the hush that lieth on the hills!
Let all the murmurs of the valley sink
Far down, far distant, like a cup that spills
Its sweetness on a drowsy-mosséd lawn
Smelling of twilight as the rooks sail by
And the last twitterings of the sparrows cease —
With nought above me but Orion's horn,
Calling thro' space to Perseus, let me lie.
Silence; — a plover's scream, — the world's release.

Nothing about me but the close-cropp'd grass
And mushroom-rings and dew-ponds high and lonely
In a half-dream I let my fancies pass
Like ripples on a lake, and dally only
With those that seem in league with careless sleep;
Such as the thought of caverns floored with sand
Thro' which the gurgling tide ebbs, lifting slow
And dropping the cold weed, and bearing deep
Its drift of shells and shingle far from land,
Far out to sea, where the great steamers go —

Such as the falling, in a moonlit night,
Of leafy shadows on an empty way
Fringed with tall-waving grass and parsley white
Which not a single foot has stirred that day;
Such as the stillness of a roofless shed
Rising amid the reeds of a vast plain
Where thro' the willow-tops the night-winds hum
And the old sorrow in a lover's head

Listens all night long to the sobbing rain,
Listens and weeps, and dreams that she has come.

Squeeze out the cowslip-wine, O fairy hands!
  Long, long ago I tasted such a cup,
And weary now of foreign loves and lands
  I kiss the arms that once more lift it up,
The shadowy arms full of mysterious sleep.
The wheel of my life's fever comes at last
Full circle — I am tired — let me rest.
Let this wine lull the pulses that must keep
Beating reiterations of the past —
Too many lives I've lived — The end is best.

The mushroom-rings grow dark — The dew-ponds fade.
  Thro' the hushed night Orion blows his horn.
The brooding Downs a solemn couch have made,
  Where I can sleep away all earthly scorn,
And all the ache of life, and all the throb
Of all its engines. Somewhere from the hills
Comes like a human voice the peewit's cry;
Silence — the world's release; a whimpering sob
From distant sheep-folds; — and a lost face fills
My landscape; — she is with me; — I can die.

THE POND-NEWT — A PORTRAIT

SILKY and soft and lewd,
  Leering at good and ill,
Nature in him has spewed
  A serpent we cannot kill.

Covering with glittering slime
  The flowers that whet his wit,
He ravishes Heaven for a rhyme
  And harrows Hell for a hit.

He would lose his soul to thrust
  A deep and poisonous dart,
Not exactly for lust,
  Into his darling's heart.

And yet he disarms our spleen —
  His eyes are hunted and wild.
In the head of the toad a jewel is seen.
  He is a wounded child.

IN A ROMAN GARDEN

THE pomegranates bloom red
Above my head;
And a marble god impassively
From the yellow roses watches me.
The calm of his face, like music, brings
A thousand Summers, — a thousand Springs.
My husband — kind soul! — is out of sight;
Visiting the Hermaphrodite.

The black and red book I carry
Has pages upon this place —
Did the man who wrote it marry,
And hate his wife's mute face?

Three splashing fountains call
To the yellow roses and fling
Spray; but no heed at all
Takes he, that marble thing.

Strange! Till this hushed noon-day
Great Rome herself has been
Like the drops of the fountains' play
Unheeded and unseen.

But the calm of that classic head!
It renounces. It lets all go.
But over its brow is shed
A light few mortals know.

And into my spirit streams
A strange unwonted stir,

While the red Pomegranate dreams
And the fountains play to her.

O lonely and classic head,
I too can renounce and wait,
While the Pomegranates bloom red
At Love's forsaken gate!

What matter if with that girl
Whose eyes are like stars of night,
And her throat like a column of pearl,
He visits Hermaphrodite?

I also, the wife foredone,
Foredoomed, as a tale that is told,
Can sit serene in the sun
Inspired by wisdom old.

For the clue to these marble things
Is the clue to our human pain; —
Renounce; and a thousand Springs
Burst into bloom again.

CORPUS, CAMBRIDGE

NOTHING can I recall,
O Alma Mater, of thee
Save a crumbling ivied wall
And a world of obliquity.

Nothing but shades discreet,
Politic, glib of tongue,
Pirouetting on tip-toe feet
To where the Mass is sung: —

The Mass, or whatever most
In Evangelic places
Prefers the Holy Ghost
To flamboyant grimaces: —

Nothing: and yet I lie!
Across my memory flame,
Like blood-drops on ivory,
The syllables of a name.

Like a red wound in the breast
Of a god, like a maiden's cry
For her ravished virginity,
Like a torch that burneth a city,
Comes to me over the years,
A wraith of splendour and tears.
Christopher Marlowe — shrive him, God! —
Walked and blasphemed on Corpus sod.

THE OLD STORY

OF the bitter shafts of love
That poison human veins
Lost Opportunity
Excites the cruellest pains.

"An hour too late" — and all
We touch and see
Turns to a frozen wall
Of misery!

Like drops of burning rain
That ghastly "what might have been"
Torments our wretched brain
With its litany obscene.

And our heart gives one wild cry
Against the unchanging law: —
"Let eternity go by,
"And the past be as before!

"Welcome the uttermost harms
"That hell holds in its power,
"So I clasp her once in my arms
"As I might have — in that hour!"

THE RECRUIT

CARTER for Mister Manley,
He worked at Willum's Mill
And up by barton and down by mead
He sang to the maidens upon his reed.
"Apples be ripe" he sang to them;
"And nuts be brown" they answered him.

From England banished far
In the madness of the war,
With a bullet thro' his throat
He gasped the ancient note;
His comrades laughed at the words he sang;
But the dying men died without a pang.
"Apples be ripe" he sang to them;
"And nuts be brown" they answered him.

In the hospital the nuns
As his own end drew near
Asked him what message he wished to send
To those he held most dear.
Sweetly they spoke to him of Christ
Whose blood for all the world sufficed.

But his thoughts were at Willum's Mill
Along with Mister Manley.
Up by barton and down by mead
Someone was playing upon his reed.
"Apples be ripe" sang the holy nuns;
"And nuts be brown" answered the guns.

THE VOICE OF THE WORM

THE Prophets and the Saints forever keep
  Crying their cry of, "Live! Have Courage!
    Live!
The cisterns of our misery flow deep:
  Deeper flows joy — Have Faith! Have Courage!
    Live!"

I only, I, the worm who drank the blood
  Of Satan when he fell,
Have from eternity this cry withstood,
  Out of the pit of hell.

Courage? What is it but the old illusion
  Forged by the sly Life-stream
To lure its creatures on to new confusion
  From world-dream to world-dream.

I, the worm coiled in Demogorgon's brain,
  I, who saw Lucifer
Hurled from the highest heaven, alone remain
  Indifferent to this stir.

Not noble, not heroic, only fools,
  Are they who "accept life"
With gallant catchwords borrowed from the schools
  Of philosophic strife.

Too many gods have I seen born and die.
  Hold ye your peace — This "courage" will pass
    too.
O latest Raiment of the eternal Lie,
  Snug 'mid your rags I yet shall spit at you!

I, who saw fall from heaven the Morning's Son
  Whom his own strength sufficed,
I, who lie coiled forever on the Stone
  Where they entombed the Christ,

Am not to be deceived if, — after Pride
  And Love, — men credence give
To the Illusion that puts both aside;
  And cries, "Have Courage! Live!"

AFTER READING WILLIAM BLAKE

THOSE who cut a worm in twain
With Jesus' blood the roadway stain.
Those who aside from the harlot turn
Throw Jesus' heart in the flame to burn.
He who kills love in a woman's bed
Drives the thorns into Jesus' head.
He who flings poison on love from pride
Thrusts the spear into Jesus' side.

ALONE

ALONE!
That is the broken cry
Of the soul whose bitter lot
Even Christ shareth not.
And none shareth it, — none.

None shareth it, — none!
A veil falls down and hides us.
Our lovers search and weep.
More than the world divides us.
We only met in sleep.
Alone!

THE NEW MAGDALENE

SHE turns her with sick heart
From the crowd with the burning eyes.
She flees to the woods apart
Where the old world's shadow lies.

And there in the leafy gloom,
With her white face hid in her hair,
She moans the unpitied doom
Of the flesh that's born too fair.

Softly with amorous tread
From the dark doth a Satyr creep
And standing close to her head
Watches the wanton weep.

Like the mask of a thousand years
The lust in him drops away,
And big immortal tears
Make a grave for it in the clay.

And gently on bended knees
He worships the wanton there,
Pouring old heathen litanies
Into her drooping hair.

And the heart of the old world then
Flings forth its ancient balm,
And the burning eyes of men
Can work her no more harm.

THE OLD SONG

LET the dead go wed the dead.
Let the shroud go weave the shroud.
Twixt the daisies white and red,
Kneel upon holier ground.

Pansies are sweeter, are sweeter than rue;
Cowslips are rarer, are rarer than willow;
Kiss the boy who kneels with you.
Make the cuckoo-flowers your pillow.

Death comes soon, and youth has wings;
Snatch the chance the time uncovers;
Spring alone the crocus brings;
God have mercy on all lovers!

FIRST AND LAST

THE primroses are dead.
From the blackbird's yellow bill
The first wild music's fled.
Where the oozy blue-bell-stalks
Hide the anemones
The primroses are dead.

Purple and scarlet and gay,
The later summer flowers
Burn on the throat of the day;
But on the parchéd ground
Where passed that first wild sound
The primroses are dead.

Not lightly can they bear —
Hearts delicate and rare —
The loss of love's first cry.
Rich may be summer's bloom.
It only hides a tomb.
When that cry's dead they die.

WORSHIP

BROKEN and maimed and bruised
We beat on the iron gate
And cry for the word refused
With a cry most desolate.

From the sea's edge windy and lone
From the land's heart troubled and dim
The moan of the dead joins with our moan
And the cry goes up to Him.

And cold on his ultimate throne
His arms hang stiff by his side,
And his mouth falls open and wide,
Pitiful — frozen to stone.
His dead eyes stare from his face
His dead hands stiffen apart
And the vultures of space
Flap screeching about his heart.

But while we beat at the gate
And cry, with our dead, to the Dead,
The great Sun, splendid, elate,
Rises above our head,
And heedless of that lost thing
Pitiful there in space,
And heedless of our doomed race,
The children play on the sun-warmed sod
And the laughing lovers worship God.

A DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT

MISJUDGED, misread, mistrusted, unappeased,
A virgin, proud and cold;
Lovelier than he whom the fond Cyprian seized
And could not hold;
He moves amid our throng, sits at our board,
Eats, drinks, and wounds us all;
The Incarnate Writing of the Invisible Lord
On our Belshazzar's wall.

He loathes us. His contempt none can assuage.
Yet is he maddening-fair!
He mocks our passion, as he scorns our rage.
His air is not our air.
Our glory and our pride he turns to shame
With his cold virgin eyes.
Up! Let us drive him from us whence he came;
And stripped of his disguise!

THE DEATH-BIRDS

WILL the rain on the drenchéd mould
Never have rest?
Never — never — wail the death-birds in their flying.
Will the vulture of night never fold
Its wings on its breast?
Never — never — wail the death-birds in their flying.
Will the wind that teases the trees
Never be stilled,
Or the pain at the heart of all these
Never fulfilled?
Never — never — wail the death-birds in their flying.
Will the earth never cease from its moan
Or the sea from its crying?
Never — never — wail the death-birds in their flying.
And the whisper of their dirge
Blends with the ocean-surge, —
"Christ's heart is turned to stone;
And God's pity gallows-high
Under the weary sky
Like a corpse stark and bleak
Can only whistle and creak."

FINIS

ON softly stepping feet
She has gone to seek her dead.
What will she do when she finds how deep
They have buried so dear a head?

She will go to the cowslips then
And the cuckoo-flowers so pale.
In the cold wet dawn she will go,
When the mist is on the vale.

And lying prone on the ground,
While the white clouds over her pass,
Thro' her loosened hair she will hear the sound
Of the worms beneath the grass.

And the touch of that cold earth-bed
And the cowslips against her cheek
Will leave on her mouth the kiss of her dead,
And she will no further seek.

SEMELE

HONEY and milk for her
Whose kiss tastes of the sun!
The burning candles of all the dead
Bow to her one by one.

Pluck all the summer's bloom
Her sweet bare knees to cover!
Quick! or the sealed-up tomb
Will vent its dust to love her.

Her eyelids droop. Away!
The gods — the gods have found her.
She was ours; but we are clay.
May their arms be flame around her!

NEPENTHE

WHERE ferns hang cool by the forest pool,
And moss at the roots of trees
Grows richly green in the flickering sheen
Of noons that drowse the breeze,
Be her eyes forgot and her hair forgot,
And forgot — Oh Christ! — her lips!
On the ancient breast of the mother of rest
We may mock a world's eclipse.

DIALOGUE

I HAVE tasted the gall with my tongue,
And the wormwood with my lips.
"Enough; curse life!" cries the grave.
I have heard my love-dirge sung
And the knell of friendship rung.
I have been scourged with whips.

But still, in a garden I know,
The purple hyacinths blow;
And their scent is as it was;
And still where the long tides run
The wet sands gleam in the sun;
And their laugh is as it was.

Therefore I say to the grave —
"Though gall and wormwood sting,
And the whips of fate bite shrewdly,
There is yet another thing.
Hyacinths are purple yet,
And the bright sea-sands still wet;
And the touch of them both awakes in me
Memories deeper than memory.
Therefore, though death can save,
I cannot curse life, O grave!

SLEEP

THE city sleeps; the fierce metallic roar
Ebbs like a broken wave;
A wave drawn back to the silent ocean-floor.
The city sleeps; and the sleeper, what dreams she?
She dreams
Of tiny grasses, lifted and dropped and lifted,
As the wind goes over the hill;
Of feathery reed-tops, rising and falling and rising,
As the mill-stream turns the mill.

The city sleeps; and the dreamer, what dreams he?
He dreams
Of tender fern-fronds drooping o'er mosses cool
By the cart-track's side;
Of crimson seaweed rocked in the shadowy pool
Where the boat-keels ride.

The city sleeps; and one by one the clouds
Darken the moon.
The dreamers mutter and toss and softly weep;
Then, cold and still, like corpses in their shrouds,
They sleep.

THE EPIPHANY OF THE MAD

I AM the voice of the outcast things,
The refuse and the drift.
What the waves wash up and the rivers spurn
And the Golgothas of the cities burn,
For these my song I lift.

I sing in dust; I sing in mire;
I sing in slag and silt;
I sing in the reek of the rubble-fire;
I sing where sewers are spilt;

I sing where the paupers have their grave;
I sing where abortions lie;
I sing where the mad-house nettles wave;
I sing where the hearse goes by.

And all my tune is taught by the Moon;
For the Moon looks down on all;
And the song I sing of each outcast thing
Is a mad Moon-madrigal.

But all my thoughts as I sing this tune
Are about a little star
That soon or late, that late or soon,
The evilest things beneath the moon
Approach and cleanséd are.

DUALITY

I NEVER pass a human house
But another house is there,
Too vague, too sad, for man or mouse,
Its rafters made of air.

Of night's black feathers are its doors,
Its roof of woven mist,
And in its shadowy corridors
Strange phantoms keep their tryst.

I never cross a lonely road
But another road I see,
Where no man travels with his load,
No turnpike takes its fee, —

With ancient floods its pools are brimmed;
Old footprints mark its edge;
But not a swallow ever skimmed
Along its withered sedge.

I never pass a holy place
But another shrine is there,
With sorrows written on its face
No man or god may share;

With sorrows graven on its stone,
Washed by ten-thousand rains,
And sealéd urns whose ashes moan
Old lost forgotten pains.

I never pass a sleeper's head
But another head I see;
And Christ — or Christ's own Mother — dead
Lies there in front of me.

O double life, O double death,
When will these spells confused
Dissolve 'neath some tremendous breath
Or be forever fused?

When will the house, the road, the shrine,
No more their secret keep,
And the human face seem as divine
Awake, as in its sleep?

IT IS NOT NICE

IT is not nice to see
  Quite such little children
  Shiver with cold.
It is not nice to see
Quite such little children
  Bought and sold.
It is not nice to hear the raucous
Voices of the civic caucus
Talk of popular education
While with hideous emulation
  They scramble and spit
  For the golden bit.
It is not nice to see the faces
Of eminent persons in their places,
  Plotting after their sort;
It is not nice their women to see
Staring at the frippery
By rascals in shop-windows hung!
All these, and other things, among —
  And worse is in the list —
Might really make a humble poet —
If he weren't afraid to show it
And wasn't earning his bread
By making rhymes on the dead
For the fattest of the living,
And hadn't a slight misgiving
And a suspicion dim
That 'twould be the end of him —
  Into — so bad is the list —
  An absolute Nihilist!

PRAYER

CHOKED we live, and choked we die.
Give us air and give us space,
You intolerable sky!
'Tis not much — a little grace —
'Tis not long — a little thing —
That before our burying
We may cry one natural cry.

O to put into one breath —
Only one, —
All the poison of our hate,
All — all — all — that came too late;
Give us that; — and when that's done,
Death!

COME, LET IT GO

COME, let it go. The little shoots
Another year will blow,
While you and I beneath their roots
Will neither care nor know.

Another year the quivering lark
Poised on mid-air will skim,
While you and I within the dark
Will take no heed of him.

No question then, dear heart, 'twill be
As to the gold we piled,
Or how the witch, prosperity,
Was cozened and beguiled.

Was I, in whom you trusted, kind?
Did you, who loved me, keep
True? We shall sleep then to our mind!
If not — we still shall sleep.

DILEMMA

THE shadows fall as the sun sinks down
And heavily droops the day;
A leaden pall weighs on tower and town
And the last of the dead leaves flutters down
And the swallows fly away.

And the road winds always across the plain,
And always its milestones glimmer white;
But the travellers there come not again:
They are lost in the night.

Will the swallows never fly back to our eaves?
Will our branches never bear fresh green leaves?
Will the sun never lift our load?
Must we live weighed down in a twilight-town
Or be lost on a midnight-road?

THE WINDS THAT WEPT

THE winds that wept round Helen lone,
The waves that Iseult's vessel tossed,
I hear them on this beach;
I hear them and their wordless moan
Comes to me like a spirit lost
That struggles to find speech.

The same old sobbing, the same cry,
Rising and falling on the sand,
No pause and no relief —
Is there no heart in all the sky?
Has not one god a human hand
To ease us of our grief?

Not one! Not one! And so it goes.
And how it goes too well we know
By the eternal sea!
Unto one end all sorrow flows.
Helen and Iseult long ago
Have gone — And go shall we.

YOUR PORPHYRIES, YOUR TAPESTRIES

YOUR porphyries, your tapestries,
Your silks from Samarcand,
Your musk, your myrrh, your ambergris,
They are not worth a single kiss
On a country maiden's hand;

They are not worth a single hour
In a certain field I know,
Where the only flower is the cuckoo-flower,
And the only thing that marks the hour
Is the shade the chestnuts throw.

The sliding down of the twilight dim
On a garden wet with rain
When the blackbird's song floats away from him
Over the world's mysterious rim
And we hear it not again;

The crackling sticks of a country fire,
And the smell of wheaten bread,
And the sweet sharp sting of old desire,
And the good ale mounting high and higher
Into each honest head;

Are dearer to me than the shimmering sun
On San Clemente's steps,
Or the foot-falls echoing one by one,
On the stones of the Place du Panthéon,
Of the "Quartier" demi-reps.

Your Castilian airs, and your Tuscan strains,
  And your flute that soothes and flatters,
May lull the soul; but the heart remains
True to its ancient fields and lanes
  And its homely "country matters."

THE ESCAPE

IN the dreadful city's roar
I have my clue to peace;
And I carry it evermore,
And it always brings release.

'Tis a spot which I once found,
Bordered by grasses tall,
Where a garden touches a burying-ground,
And elm-tree shadows fall.

Here I can feel my bones
Mouldering one by one,
Far from the rattle of wheels on stones,
While the slowly-mounting sun

Gleams on the slope of the hill
And shines on the stream beyond;
And the village maidens bend and fill
Their buckets at the pond.

And the people little guess
As they pass me in train and car,
Why I stretch my legs, and press
My hands together, and stare —

They can see not the slope of the hill;
They can see not the stream beyond;
They can see not the elm-tree hushed and still,
Nor the buckets at the pond —

They know not how tender-sweet
  It is to feel one's bones
With honest earth-mould mingle, and meet,
In the dust, with delicate hands and feet,
  Far from these clattering stones.

RENAISSANCE

STILL we hear it —
Clear, immortal, undying, —
The old sweet chant
Of those that worship the sun!

Pallid, perverse, diseased,
The mystical rabble
Gibber and twitter and weep.
With a waving of leprous arms,
With a beating of epicene breasts,
They mutter their prayers to the night,
And the moon, their odalisque.

But still we hear it —
Clear, immortal, undying, —
The old sweet chant
Of those that worship the sun!

DAFFODILS

A BATTERED English actor, hired to act
In a Chicago play-house, — act the fool;
Lean purse, sick soul, nerves mercilessly racked
In what the preachers call life's wholesome school,

Shuffling down Wabash, with a heart that pined
For water-brooks and the eternal hills,
If not for Zion, was entranced to find,
In a shop-window, living daffodils.

"O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
From Dis's wagon!" In a moment fell
Before that golden shout the hated wall
That held him. All the hubbub, all the hell

Rolled like a vapour from the heart that ached;
And he saw Oxford, saw the lovely tower
Of Magdalen, saw the gardener-men who raked —
Old men, who had known Swinburne in his hour —

Dead leaves across the graves of poets dead;
And he saw purple loose-strife drowse and dream
As his barge passed it, drifting, and his head
Drowsed also, carried down that gracious stream.

And he forgot how he had played the mime,
Mimicked his fathers' gods to make them laugh,
Bawled the sweet ancient ditties out of time,
And for a drachma torn his soul in half.

He saw the marigolds which Isis yields;
  He saw the Scholar-gipsy of the Song
Pass on his quest; he saw the Christ Church fields,
  The sunlit banks and the familiar throng.

Wabash with all its rails and all its roar
  Melted to nothing, and once more he moved
Wrapped in youth's dreams and legendary lore
  Where Burton jested and where Shelley loved.

"For the flowers now, that" — How his poor heart
    fills,
  And his tense nerves relax! What dreams! What
    dreams!
He stops — that bunch of living Daffodils
  Brings more than Oxford to his eyes — He seems

To hear the Mediterranean's brimming tide
  Again; and from his wounded spirit, borne
Away, all anguish ceases; at his side
  She stands — the poor fool is no more forlorn.

IN A HOTEL WRITING–ROOM

WE artists have strange nerves!
That man in front of me,
I had been hating him
Implacably,
Just for the lines and curves
Of his unconscious face,
Lines that brought no disgrace
Upon humanity.
But when that same man spoke,
And with a grunt and wheeze
Asked me how many *c*s
Had the word "Necessity,"
The cord of my hatred broke.
"For how's a beggar to tell"
He said; — and I loved him for it —
"With a word as long as hell,
If no wise blighter tells us?"
—"You are right, my friend. We may score it
Over and over with *c;*
But at last it is not we
Who spell 'Necessity,'
But Necessity who spells us!"
He smiled. I smiled. And between
Your artist and your drummer
Swept, on a breeze of summer,
A wave of sympathy;
And we even came to wonder
Where — in the name of thunder —
We had met before this scene.

TO AN IDEALISTIC POET

O WHY, dear heart, drag in
The over-soul — and why
Must that poor phantom-thing
They call democracy

Crow in your verse and fly
Skyward on barn-door wings?
Each is a lie — a lie!
And lies are ugly things.

Do you not know — with all your iteration —
You who have lived so long
Listening the Muse's song,
What is the rôle of true Imagination?

Goethe to Eckermann
Said once; — and he was wise, —
"Avoid high thought and scan
Nature with both your eyes."

"Do Hercules himself,"
Said Hamlet, "what he may;
The cat will mew; the dog
Will have his day."

Democracies and over-souls,
Life spins them up and sucks them down,
As round the sun the old earth rolls
And the green leaves bud in lane and town.

Over-souls and democracies
  Life sucks them down and spins them up,
  As the immense translunar cup
Gleams with its stellar autocracies.

In the streets of the town the harlot waits;
  Even so, — democracy or not.
The lovers lean upon country gates;
  Even so, — the over-soul or not.

The little things— the old world's heart—
  Come back, my Poet, and write of these!
The Preacher will perform his part
  With the over-souls and democracies.

THE UPLIFTER — THREE SCENES

AT last! And every word —
How hushed the people are! —
Is yours, my hawk-eyed bird;
Is yours, my quivering star.
Great heart! The flames which roll
Thro' you redeem the race.
Your lips, sweet; — no, your soul!
— The signal! Take your place.

Don't laugh! I do not love you when you laugh.
Yes, child; I am that person they talk about —
The Uplifter of the people, the ——, or half
Of me is — or perhaps a third! What? Did I shout?
It is a trick I learnt from someone —; well?
Yes! But it doesn't matter! Yes; but not as young
As you — or half so pretty! I cannot tell
What I saw in her. Pest! Your prompter's bell.

Tulips? No; — only pansies in that row!
How that thrush sings! Hand me the spade — no; wait
Till I have stamped the earth around them; — so!
You can have no conception how I hate
The common crowd! A minx it is — a flirt.
See 'em again? Not I! It is too late.
Henceforth all I uplift is — honest dirt!

KINGS

KINGS drop from ghostly hands
Their sceptres dark with rust.
Kings turn their ghostly feet
From footstools fallen to dust.
The lovely breasts they leant upon
Are all to ashes gone.

The wine of Tyre is poured out.
The towers of Sidon are desolate.
The swords of Nineveh are broken.
The dancers of Babylon lie dead.
But the wind blowing over the drowned sea-weed,
Over the salt margins,
Over the grey pools,
Over the tossed-up shingle,
Has the same form of nothingness,
Has the same voice of supplication,
And cries aloud upon the same Moon,
As when in the silent Desert
They built the Pyramids.

The ghosts of kings troop by,
And their Lemans sorrowfully
Wail as they watch them pass.
And standing on the sands
Where the dead fade and sink,
I stoop and write on the brink,
Words that the wind understands.

THE DREAM

THE fields are full of light. They hold it up
Rich, warm, and wavering, in a shadowy cup.
I drink it, and I seem
To taste an ancient dream.

The night is full of mists. It holds them up
Quivering and cool in a black marble cup.
I drink them, and they seem
To taste of the same dream.

The woods are full of rain. All day it falls.
All night it beats against the city walls.
The winds go wailing by
Under an empty sky
And all the world is as a bitter cup
That Life itself holds up.
I drink it. And I know most miserably
What that dream meant for me.

DEATH

DRIFT of dying leaves whirls round me,
And disconsolately, like bells
Of a submerged city, sounds the
Dirge that tells
Of the streaming air-borne hosts
Of the interminable ghosts
From the graves the planets bear
Through the windless whispering air:
Ghosts of all the dead in Mars,
Ghosts of Saturn, ghosts of stars
More remote from Earth than those
Which Algol or Orion knows.
And the sound of Death ascends
From the universal air
Falling softlier when it blends
With the primal silence there.
From the Milky Way wide-spread,
Rain into outer space the dead.
Into that outer space are hurled
Ghosts from worlds beyond the World.

The worm that feeds on Cæsar's head
Wonders, groping in the dark,
Why, if all these dead are dead,
Ever flamed the vital spark.
And the reeling earth,
Sick of the weight of a sky heavy with death,
Sullenly muttereth
Curses on its own birth.
But the vital flames still spout,
And naught can put them out!

Dust piled on dust
Cannot smother Life's lust!
Every dead leaf that strews the breeze
Manures the ground to make other trees;
And every dead Moon that fills the sky
Will be a new-shining planet by and bye.
Enough! Let it cease, this reiteration!
Let it cease, let it cease, this repetition!
These ghosts that are drift-wood to make new fire
Fill me with a strange desire.
Would they might sink and lose their breath
In a death deeper than any death!
Sink utterly, utterly, and be
Swallowed up in Eternity!

PRAYER

IF Beauty only died with Love,
And Life with Beauty fled,
How sweet it were to live and love
Ere we were dead!
Is there not reason to pray?

Put up the sword and pass!
Pull off the mask and kneel!
Like mimes and shadows in a glass
Through life we steal.
Is there not reason to pray?

The flowers bloom
Is the bud's doom;
And the flowers fall
When the fruit ripens on the wall.

Lamps draw the moths and burn them.
Hopes draw our hearts and spurn them.
Then comes the end;
And the rain, the rain is on the roof!

Thus in a narrow oblong hole,
Beyond the clutches of the mole,
Where no bat's cry can come,
And the winds are dumb,
The empty case of Love, the husk of Beauty,
Is laid in the cold clay.
Is there not reason to pray?
There is reason to pray, God knows!
And He knows if He hears us!

THE UNDER-WORLD

SINK, sink down, O heart, where out of its shadows
Thy lost Atlantis
Cries to thee with the cry of a populous city
Softened by distance.

Let the dim green depths and the quivering moon-
beams
Soothe thee a little,
Till the long hot fevers and lusts of living
Leave thee in quiet.

Let the drowned steeples and shaken belfries
Lull thy disturbance.
Let the swinging censers of submerged altars
Heal thy distresses.

Sink, sink down, O heart, where the tossing sea-weed
Wavers and trembles.
Sink, sink down where the great wrecked ships go
drifting
Borne on the current.

All is equal there; where thy lost Atlantis
Cries to thee softly;
With the sweet low cry of a thing forgotten
Plaintively calling.

Nothing matters there, where the waves of moonlight
Sink to the sea-floor;
Life and Death are words of a tedious language,
Let us forget them!

Let us forget, O heart, all thy recent rages,
Thy foolish fires;
Here thy long-lost love is abiding for thee;
Sink, and possess her!

Sink, sink down, O heart, and possess thy darling,
Thy lost Atlantis,
Till the long hot fevers and lusts of living
Leave thee in quiet.

THE IMMIGRANT

THIS raving crowd, immense and blind,
  This smoke, this filth, this rain,
On her withdrawn and virgin mind
  Leave not the slightest stain.
Stark poverty and monstrous wealth,
  Huge stores or huts of wood,
She passes, centered in herself
  And armoured in her mood.

Her smiling Attic eyes keep still,
  Remote, archaic, gay,
The freshness of the old world's will,
  The secret of its way;
Too deep-aloof to feel disdain
  Her classic spirit turns
To where unfouled by smoke or rain
  The ancient altar burns.

Its flame goes with her, proudly borne
  In the porphyry of her soul,
As an ice-cold vase of crystal scorn
  Might hold a burning coal;
And all the squalor of our grief
  And the grossness of our glee
Endure the intolerable relief
  Of her serenity.

THE MESSENGERS

THE shadows in the garden listen
While the flowers weep.
Why does the door swing on its hinges?
The shadows on the roadway listen
While the grasses sleep.
Why does the gate stand open so wide?

Over the hills where the sun went down
The Messengers come.
They stoop. They stumble. Their hair is white.
They are dumb.

What shall we do to the messengers when they enter
To make them whisper the thing?
Hush! Be silent. Our mother the Earth to her centre
Trembles at what they bring!

Wreathe roses, spread tables, pour wine;
Feast them — but let them depart!
Peace, Earth! We will not know.
Who are we that so
We should break our mother's heart?

Hush! They are going now:
Going as they came.
And we wipe the sweat from our brow
And name God's name.

But the shadows still listen;
And the gate remains still open;
And the door still swings on its hinges.

THE PUBLIC GARDEN

A BURDEN of horrible loathing
Weighed down on me out of the sky,
Heavy and like a pall.
Can I endure this and live?
What matter? Under the ground
Moles burrow and lob-worms crawl;
Yet quite untroubled we lie!

This morning I took my seat
In a public garden.
Desolation and I
Stared at the gravel.
A fountain that could not play
Mocked each new-comer;
And the white sick eyes of the day
Jeered at the summer.

Far off, in the town, church-bells
Expression brought
To the loathing my spirit felt,
After this sort; —

"Round our altars flaps the bat,
Squealing like an unlaid ghost,
And the holy bread of the Host
Is nibbled by a rat."

An arbour littered with dust
Blinked at the garden.
A gate of iron and rust
Guarded the garden.

A wind that smelt of the town
  Sighed incessant through these,
Whirling torn papers about,
  And fretting the trees.

Euonymus bushes and Privet
  Grew starkly there;
With shrubs less adapted than civet
  To cleanse a foul air.
Steely and grey looked the sun,
  Like a sickle on sheaves;
Thunder-drops one by one
  Fell on the leaves.

A mackintoshed woman obtruded
  Her chin to the rain;
Peering at me, as though I intruded
  On her private pain.
Her mackintosh smelt of the grave-yard.
  A cemetery touch
Made her cheeks pale as corruption
  And loathsome as such.

This woman seemed Horror's twin-sister.
  She harmonized well
With the gate and the arbour and gravel
  Of that corner of hell.
She was Virtue's own child, but — sweet Saviour! —
  How dreadful and drear;
As the sick white eyes of that moment
  Turned on her their leer.

This woman, thought I, is the spirit
  Of this frightful place!
She is old as the planet, and with it
  Goes mumbling through Space.

What matter? The earth is sufficient
To lie on each head
That aches from these visions pernicious
With which we are fed.

Though mackintoshed females like corpses
Peer at us in rows;
Though winds drive torn papers before them
And Euonymus grows
In eternal successions of gardens
Whose fountains can't play;
Though bats flap down over our altars
And rats eat Christ's Body;
Though moles dig the roots of Creation
And lob-worms crawl through it;
We shall find in the arms of Negation
Sweet peace and ensue it!

TO M. C. P.

YOUR hands are cold. Your lips are cold.
And colder still your breast.
But to you I turn when all is told,
Simply to rest.

I only loved you after you were dead;
For only then I knew
What an accomplice in her travail-bed
Life had in you.

The shade of all the murderous suffering
That cradles birth
Fell on the ivory forehead of the thing
You were on earth.

And who that ever read Life's sorrow stark
On a dead forehead writ
Beheld such grief as yours bore, ere the dark
Swallowed and cancelled it?

Your hands are cold. Your lips are cold.
And colder still your breast.
But to you I turn when all is told,
Simply to rest.

I turn to you and the Night your friend!
May your crescent moons
And your silences and sad sea-tunes
And your wistful-plaintive rhythmic runes
Drift over me without an end;
Drift over me and drive away
Mention and memory of Day.

For I want before I die
To feel as midnight feels when keen and cold
The high stars mount into their places old
And Cygnus spreads his wings across the sky.

I want before I die, without despair,
To face what is left there,
When one by one life's masks drop from her brow,
And the cold glacial snow
Of her abysmal smile makes final scorn
Of all that she hath borne!

I want before I die to breathe an air
More large, more calm, more rare,
More deeply dipped in Space.
I want to look Orion in the face
And wear the indifference that the hushed dead wear.

For I am weary of the gleams,
The dust, the laughter, and the dancers' tread.
I want before I die to wake from dreams
And feel the Outer Dark about my head.

Your hands are cold. Your lips are cold.
And colder still your breast.
But to you I turn when all is told,
Simply to rest.

SONG OF THE OLD MEN

SHADOWS drifting, drifting, drifting, drifting;
Wraiths of mist and rain;
Shadows beckoning, beckoning, beckoning, beckoning,
Down the vaulted lane.
They go before us, and we limp behind them,
Slowly, and in pain.

Will no god or angel tell us truly
Whose the faces hidden by those cowls?
Whose the hands those hoods conceal so throughly?
Whose the light limbs underneath those shrouds?

Saints! That Shadow, slenderer than the others!
My Lost Love — 'tis she!
Christ! That Shadow, taller than its brothers!
My Friend of Friends — 'tis he!

We are dull. We hardly may remember
The sweet magic words that once could move —
Old lewd country-jests, soft signals tender,
Mad wild quips and nonsense-lures of love.

Will no god or angel turn and find me
What I said that made her kiss and cling?
Will no god or demi-god remind me
What I did to make him crown me king?

Has this vaulted lane not even echoes?
Have these wraiths not even tears to shed?
No matter. All is equal. Vaults are lifted,
Lanes levelled, tears forgotten, when we're dead!

Shadows drifting, drifting, drifting, drifting,
    Wraiths of mist and rain,
To eternal silence trooping dumbly,
    Done with pain.
Done with consciousness and memory and identity
        and pain.

THE JOY OF LIVING

THE Earth is weary and dull as a stone.
When will the terrible spirit of life
Leave her alone?
Why must every day she bring forth again
Trouble and agitation and pain,
Passion and pity, and stress and strife,
Under the spirit of life?

The little grasses on her breast
Sigh to be left at rest.
Why must they spread their seeds so wide,
Only to fill the fields with pride?
The souls of infants within the womb
Sigh to be left in that peaceful tomb.
Why must they force their way to the light
Only to sink back into night?

The thoughts of great and inspired wit
Have little longing those brains to quit.
Far sooner they'd dream in their cradles furled
Than roam about and convert the world.

The quiet gulfs of abysmal Space,
What have they done to inherit
This cruel merit,
This bitter reward,
Of being rent by the planet race,
And torn by the meteor's sword?

From the heights and the depths,
From the seas and the hills,
Goes up forever
The ancient cry —
What have we done
That we should live to suffer;
That we should live to die?
The Earth is weary and dull as a stone.
Will life never leave her alone?

THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

WHEN the people and horses have gone
And silence has fallen,
The lonely road wakes;
And all night,
Under Cassiopeia and the Pleiades
It sighs for its lost travellers.
But at the hour before dawn,
When the stars are cold,
It whispers the world-secret.

When the ships have passed,
And their tracks have melted,
And the white horses have sunk,
The lonely sea wakes;
And all night,
Under Aldebaran and Arcturus,
It moans for its lost soul.
But at the hour before dawn,
When the stars are cold,
It whispers the world-secret.

When the camels have swept by,
And the caravan has vanished,
The lonely Desert wakes;
And all night,
Under Cygnus and Perseus,
It wails for its dead kings.
But at the hour before dawn,
When the stars are cold,
It whispers the world-secret.

A CERTAIN EVENING

THERE is no wind tonight
To blow into the clouds
The ghosts that rise upright
Out of their shrouds.
The sultry garden-plots
With odours over-brim,
And a heavy vapour blots
The sky when the stars swim.
A white moth-feathered owl
Flaps round the village roofs;
In distant yards dogs howl,
And horses stamp their hoofs.
Who knows what must forebode
These oft-repeated sighs
That breathe from the hot road
As from a throat that dies?
Who knows what must forebode
These panting sighs that pass
Along the dusty road,
As from a throat of brass?

The black trees droop and nod,
As if they bowed the head
Before some murdered god,
Borne on a litter dead.
The reeds that shivering bend
As the dark stream flows by,
Bend lower still and send
Across the flats a cry.
Somewhere, far-off, the sea,
Deep-muttering, drowns the sand,

And, like eternity,
  Moans round the frightened land.
Dumbly, from depths unplumbed,
  Struggles and stirs my heart;
Undreamed of, and unsummed,
  Is what it would impart.
The world is one vast field
  Waiting with indrawn breath
For what my heart will yield;
  But it yields only *Death*.

RESIGNATION

STRUGGLE no more: let it go —
Cries the wind to the water;
And the water answers the wind —
It is gone.

Struggle no more: let it melt —
Cries the dew to the vapour;
And the vapour answers the dew —
It has melted.

Struggle no more: let it sink —
Cries the pond to the willow;
And the willow answers the pond —
It has sunk.

Struggle no more: let it fall —
Cries the moss to the ivy;
And the ivy answers the moss —
It has fallen.

Struggle no more: Let it die —
Cries the loved to the lover;
And the lover answers the loved —
It is dead.

THE MYSTERY

CAN you not hear the sobbing in the night,
You pools of Silence?
Can you not hear the wailing on the wind,
You shores of Silence?
The stones we walk over,
The roots we uncover,
The grass by the way,
And the flames of the day,
In the same accents dolorous
Cry to the mystery over us.

Can you not hear the voices in the sea,
You isles of Silence?
Can you not hear the murmur in the trees,
You glades of Silence?
The shells that we break,
The fish that we take,
The moss that we tread,
And the graves of our dead,
In the same accents dolorous
Cry to the mystery over us.

Can you not hear the moaning in the reeds,
You banks of Silence?
Can you not hear the sighing in the sand,
You stones of Silence?
The bubbles that sink,
The stars that wink,
The rocks that crumble,
And the feet that stumble,
In the same accents dolorous
Cry to the mystery over us.

Can you not hear the rustling wings of love,
You caves of Silence?
Can you not hear the flapping wings of hate,
You towers of Silence?
The souls that are white
With the moons of night,
And the souls that are red
With the sun's blood shed,
In the same accents dolorous
Cry to the mystery over us.

Can you not hear the ticking clock of time,
You halls of Silence?
Can you not hear life's swift alternate rhyme,
You roofs of Silence?
The feet of desire,
And the lips of fire,
The hand that clings,
And the tongue that stings,
In the same accents dolorous
Cry to the mystery over us.
But the mystery answers not a word;
And passes, as though it had not heard.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

THE end with outstretched hands
Provides the balm
That gives the slipping sands
Of time their calm.
The dark bewilders and the light entices.
The end suffices.

The things forlorn we glance at as we go;
Dim patches of bleached grass,
And floating wreckage tossed on desolate seas,
And all the piteous faces that we pass,
And all the flow
Of all the tears those piteous faces show,
The end suffices these.

O end of all things giving all things peace
And bringing them release!
It is enough to name thee and be dumb.
That thou must come,
Unasked, unspeeded,
At last to all, in answer unto all;
No more is needed.

This fungus-thing unfurled,
This blunder, this contortion, this huge blot,
That it should linger not,
But into cool deep wells of death be hurled,
How just, how blest!
But let there be for us no after-world,
Lord of Eternal Rest!

THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

LET the sooth-sayers hold their peace
With their false auguries!
Let us have the truth's release,
And bow our foreheads.
Let us kiss the ground;
While over us, slowly,
Without pause, without sound —
Save one, save only one! —
The planets holy,
And the sacred sun,
In due succession,
Their bright procession
Draw out, and strew
The eyelids of the night with healing dew.

Hush! How they whisper, thro' the expectant air,
To mortal ears,
The end of all our fears!
In full enravishment
We listen for the word;
Which to have heard
Is large enfranchisement.

Let the Priests go aside and be dumb
With their false oracles!
Let the worst of all truth come.
It can only slay us!
And when we lie dead
With the earth on our head,
All hell may howl behind us.
It can never find us!

KNOWLEDGE

THE wild swan over the marshes knows
On what cold reed-bed
The witch-girl pressed the rook-boy's lips
Until they bled.

The wild owl over the mad-house knows
In what padded place
The loveliest form that ever breathed
Lies on her face.

The wild hawk over Golgotha knows
Whose patient heart
Cursed day, night, earth and heaven, before its curse
Rent it apart.

The wild kite over the world's edge knows
To what piteous end
All joy, all hope, all love, all wisdom, all desire,
In swift procession tend —
Yet none the less it soars and flashes free
Across the glaciers of eternity!

OVER THE HILL

OVER the hill —
Can you hear the sea? —
A voice I know
Is calling to me.
From a quiet place, all railed around,
Her voice is calling out of the ground.
And along the path by the high cliff's edge
Where the sea-gulls flap on the windy ledge,
And across the hill, by the straight white road,
Where the wagon creaks beneath its load,
And down the hill by the little white bridge,
And up again by the gorse-bush ridge,
On unwearied feet I must seek her side
Who all night long to me has cried;
On unwearied feet I must find the place
Where she lies with the earth upon her face.
That spot, with white-washed posts railed round,
Where she calls to me out of the heavy ground,
I have seen it in a thousand dreams.
Near the sea it always seems;
And railed with white-washed posts it gleams.
But when I cross over the little bridge
And follow the yellow gorse-bush ridge
Instead of the white-washed posts I find
An old stone-breaker half-blind,
Crouching upon a heap of stones
And eating a meal of rabbit bones.
Yet over the hill —
Can you hear the sea? —
A voice I know
Is calling to me.

And every night as I lie in my bed
The same strange vision comes into my head
And I cross the little stony bridge
And I follow the yellow gorse-bush ridge
And the white-washed posts by the road-side gleam;
Is *she* the dreamer; — am *I* the dream?

14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.
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